

Homily by Monsignor Michael Hazard

St. Joseph Church, 936 Lake Street, Kalamazoo Michigan 49001

25th Sunday of Ordinary Time

September 18, 2011

I'd like to take a look at this parable from a few different perspectives.

What may be the most natural perspective is the point of view of those "all-day suckers"—I mean the workers who "bore the burden of the day and its heat," and in the end thought of themselves as cheated or deceived. Everybody understands this perspective. "A day's work for a day's pay." Of *course* the early-hires were piqued. It's just not *fair* that the guys who were hired at three or five o'clock should be on the same pay basis as them.

Well, the thing about this perspective is that we're dealing with a parable here, not a teaching about how to pay farm-workers. When Jesus talked about the kingdom of God being like a treasure buried in a field, he was not talking about the way to buy real estate. When he gave the parable of the pearl of great price, he wasn't conducting a seminar on investments. No this parable is not about fair-wage practices.

Another customary point of view on this parable is based on an interpretation that sees it as referring to going to Heaven or not. The people, now, who are headed for heaven—those who behave themselves, deprive themselves of the "fun" things in life in order to be sure of "getting there"—might be represented by the all-day workers. They've born the burden and heat of the day, so to speak. And won't they be surprised to see sinners and partiers coming in along with them—the people who have eaten their cake already and now are getting the whole enchilada. Some of us might be in this crowd: born Catholic, practically; more or less kept our nose clean all these years. And here are the wild ones getting religion in prison and coming out and expecting a place with us in Heaven. Or maybe it's a mob character who, on his deathbed asks for baptism. That doesn't seem fair, exactly, either; except that this *is* the way some people seek eternal peace. I read somewhere, many years ago, that John Wayne asked for baptism as he was approaching death. Who's gonna tell *him* he's outta line?

Another perspective that is sometimes taken is the point of view of the Jewish Christians of the early Church. The Jewish Christians of the first century might say: Jews have been God's people for more than a thousand years. It was they who waited, waited for the Lord to come with salvation. But when Jesus comes, the gates are found to be open to every former pagan and worshiper of Astarte and whoever. How can those people who have no history with God be now the favored ones? What gives? Of course, here's where most of us might be grateful that grace is extended widely; for most of us come not from Jewish families but from non-Jewish or Gentile stock. We're the late-comers ourselves from this perspective. And we're glad to be welcome, to get the full day's pay, to have access to heaven.

Finally, let's look at the strictly personal perspective. Do we really want to be judged on the quality of our work, the hours we actually put in, the amount of grousing we didn't do? Do we want to stand before God on Payday and ask exactly for what our labor in the vineyard of Christ was *worth*?

"The Lord is near to all who call upon him," to all who call upon him in sincerity of heart.

I will praise your name forever, my King and my God. For you have made room in your vineyard for me, you have allowed me a chance to live, with my family, for another day, and for another, and even for eternity. Help me to be grateful not only for my salvation,

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but for that of my fellow-sinners, workers, hoppers, strugglers, lovers. I will praise your name forever, my King and my God.

“The Lord is near to all who call upon him.”